There was a flexing, a tensing, and suddenly the thing was done. He was seized and held down, immobile, while another consciousness imposed itself on him, matching itself to him, working its own will on his mind and body. Defensibility this position: zero. Dimly he was aware of his breathing calming, becoming deeper, his heart slowing, the steady flow of arterial blood spilling out into the dark confines of his body diminishing to a trickle, the pain fading....

"Thank God."

Jim?

With a strength of purpose he had scarcely know he possessed, he gathered himself together and pulled away from the invader--thoughts, emotions, all that was James Kirk condensing into a pinpoint black hole. Hold on. Let nothing out. Give nothing away. What if--? Quick. Stop it. Don't think. Fetal regression of the soul.

Jim?

He didn't answer. After a moment the grip on his mind loosened and the other retreated fractionally.

I'm sorry, Jim. It was necessary.

So I should lean back and enjoy it?

Your analogy is invalid.

Damn the analogy. You know what I mean.

Yes. I regret that I hurt you.

Spock.

?????

Don't endanger yourself. Please.

The danger is now minimal.

The danger is unnecessary.

No.

Spock, you are being illogical.

Possibly.

The place where they floated together darkened once again. The blackness was a palpable thing, stifling. Out of it, a voice like the sea's said, "Emotion is destructive and conducive to disorder. It leads to false conclusions."

"Yes, Father."

"You are a Vulcan. The Vulcan way is difficult, but its benefits are incalculable."

"Yes, Father."

"My son." Infinite disappointment. "Is it so hard for you?"

And to that there was no answer.

What? Not my-- Spock? Spock?

The only response was pain, shame and denial and unspeakable relief, inextricably entangled. Departure from Vulcan had been an act of sheer self-preservation, escape from intolerable pressure. After that had come the safe years shielded in a calm and logic that had always seemed beyond him before. Hands clasped firmly behind his back, offered to no one; heart firmly impervious; lips, not touching, forming prayers to the dry stones of Vulcan. Once and once only in the course of the long lonliness had he relaxed his caution, to care for Christopher Pike. And then that Captain had left the Enterprise, and a new man had come to take his place. With the ship, only with the ship. But matters had turned out otherwise. Once down, his defences could never be perfectly reassembled. The breach was permanent.

Spock? Please? Let me help?